

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 1

WALL STREET JOURNAL
8 November 1984

Procter & Gamble Fights New Rumors Of Link to Satanism

* * *
This Time, Biggest Source Is
Catholic Nuns and Priests;
Sister Domitilla's Shock

By JOLIE B. SOLOMON

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
CLYMER, Pa. — Sister Domitilla Drobnsk, the principal of St. Anthony's elementary school in this mining town east of Pittsburgh, didn't know who put the leaflet in her mailbox six weeks ago. But she knew what she had to do when she got it.

The leaflet told how the president of Procter & Gamble Co. had appeared on the Phil Donahue television show to declare his company's support for the Church of Satan. And it showed a magnified picture of P&G's "man in the moon" trademark, which it said was the sign of Satan.

So Sister Domitilla made copies of the leaflet and added a note of her own, urging a boycott of such familiar P&G products as Crest toothpaste, Tide detergent and Ivory soap. She sent 70 copies home with St. Anthony's students. "I thought I was going to fight for social justice," she says.

Satanism rumors, which first cropped up in the late 1970s, have returned to plague the nation's largest maker of household products. Although Sister Domitilla has since conceded she erred in believing the leaflet, her concession is small consolation for P&G. The company thought it had banished the Satan stories two years ago, when the flood of inquiries on its toll-free telephone lines peaked at 15,000 in one month. It was then that the company got tough. It arranged testimonials from Jerry Falwell, Billy Graham and other clergymen. And it filed six lawsuits, including one against a popular Atlanta television weatherman who had spread the rumor in non-televized lectures. The weatherman called a press conference to recant. Indeed, P&G's tactics worked so well that by late last year the company cut back record-keeping on the few calls it was getting and stopped worrying.

But last month, the company got 5,000 calls. Fully 1,600 came from Clymer and surrounding areas of western Pennsylvania, where Sister Domitilla's note and similar leaflets ignited a blaze of angry consumers. In 1982, the rumor got its first big boost from Protestant fundamentalists. This time, the largest single source group, P&G says,

has been Roman Catholic nuns and priests. The company can't explain this, nor can Russell Shaw, the secretary for public affairs at the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. "Certainly there's been no encouragement—to say the least—from official church sources," he says. He adds that the organization is considering putting out an advisory on the subject.

In the meantime, P&G is clearly frustrated. Although it vows to sue anyone responsible for spreading the Satanism story, a spokesman says: "It's pretty hard to sue a nice nun."

That description pretty much fits Sister Domitilla, an elderly woman who has spent most of her life in western Pennsylvania. The leaflet she found in her mailbox purported to describe in detail what the company's president said on the Donahue show. (Actually John G. Smale, P&G's president, never has appeared on the show.) The executive, it said, asked whether his avowal of Satanism would hurt the company's business replied, "There aren't enough Christians in the world to make a difference."

"That shocked me," Sister Domitilla recalls. She wanted everybody "to know what people are thinking about us Christians. We have to be stronger in our faith." So she signed her name to a note urging other Christians to "prove we do make a difference." And the word began to spread.

Last month, a pile of leaflets appeared at the Hairworks beauty salon on Clymer's main street. Another pile sat in the shower room at a nearby coal mine. The children at St. Anthony's were using magnifying glasses to study the P&G trademark. And at Tate's supermarket, head cashier Kate Batten had to refund the price of a can of P&G Folger's coffee to a man who refused to drink the "devil's brew."

* * * * *

EXCERPIED

In the face of ideas like those, P&G has stopped accepting on faith that its denials will lead its detractors to cease and desist. It has sent its security officers, headed by a former Federal Bureau of Investigation agent named James D. Jessee, to track down every perpetrator they can find and demand public retractions.

Mr. Jessee already has abandoned hope of finding the originators of the rumor. He will settle for finding the distributors, but even that is tough. Sister Domitilla, for example, didn't have any idea where the leaflet that appeared in her mailbox at the Mother House in Pittsburgh came from. One of those she signed was sent to P&G's headquarters by a consumer who called the com-

pany's toll-free information line and was cajoled by a P&G consumer specialist into sending the leaflet. The caller said she was calling from the Pittsburgh area but wouldn't be more specific. So one of Mr. Jessee's staffers called every convent in the Pittsburgh area until he found a Sister Domitilla.

P&G would like to find a way to permanently quash the rumor. The first go-round with Satan was "interesting," one public-relations staffer concedes. This time, everybody's a little fed up. "It's a sin, as well as illegal, to spread rumors," consumer specialist Maggie Mader chastised a recent caller.

And Mr. Jessee's men, most of whom came to P&G from the FBI or the Central Intelligence Agency, are tired of Satan detail. Mr. Jessee has recruited some help from outside investigators, who take on the work, he says, "after they stop laughing."

At P&G headquarters, though, no one laughs too loudly. The director of public relations, Robert Norrish, learned that the hard way after an interview in which, he says, he told a reporter he was amazed that anybody would connect a company like P&G with the devil—and without checking first. The article based on the interview—in what Mr. Norrish says is a misquote—had him marveling that "in 1984, so many people can get caught up in talking about Satan."

Immediately, the phone began to ring: Was Mr. Norrish belittling the devil's evil doings? "All along I've been defending your company," said one enraged woman. "I'm not going to anymore."

